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AUTHOR Arriaza, Gilberto
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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic study explored the social dynamics behind the discipline statistics provided by referrals. This paper describes the social context that creates the educational environment where social capital is generated and/or denied, starting with the application of detention as the initial step toward issuing referrals, considered a more serious disciplinary action. This paper is part of a larger 2-year ethnographic study that documents the ways social conflict mediates the socialization of children of color in an urban middle school in San Francisco, California. It looks at the ways children write narratives of resistance within contradictory cultural norms, which offer, on the one hand, a space for teachers to become protective agents who build students' capacity to decode cultural signals, to develop strong racial and cultural identity, and to cope with stressful borders and institutional barriers, identified here as social capital. On the other hand, such cultural norms offer a normalizing space that reproduces and perpetuates inequities and injustices. Appended are 4 tables and a 23-item bibliography. (Author/BT)

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By Gilberto Arriaza

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> In Mr. Young's class I'll get detention in a minute! In Mr. Mica's you get a check and you stay after class. If you get two checks you have to pick up trash, the third check is a referral.. (Roy, 7th grade student)

Introduction

This paper examines the role that social networks and protective agents play in developing and accumulating social capital among children of color. The study looks at the ways children write a narrative of resistance within contradictory cultural norms, which offer, on the one hand, a space for teachers to become protective agents who build students' capacity to decode cultural signals, to develop strong racial and cultural identity, and to cope with stressful borders and institutional barriers. On the other hand, schools offer this very same space that can be used to reproduce and perpetuate inequities and injustices.

This ethnographic study explores the social dynamics behind the discipline statistics provided by referrals. It first describes the social context that creates the educational environment where social capital is generated and/or denied, starting with the application of detention as the initial step toward issuing referrals, which is considered a more serious disciplinary action. In most cases referrals are also considered the last resort available to adults in schools to address a difficult behavioral situation. The intent of most referral practices is corrective, not preventive.

Second, the study documents the complexity of power, resistance and normalizing issues through the role that language, attitude (expressed via standing up, and talking back), reputation, and the function of social networks play in the process. The study

looks at this issues within the larger context of an institution that has been reformed, and that has shown many of the features characteristic of the new schools created throughout the last decade of the 20th century.

This study is divided in three major parts: the theoretical framework, the methodology, and the report.

Theoretical Framework

Social capital

Social capital in this paper describes individual and group capacity to negotiate social borders and institutional barriers. This capacity is developed over time through social networks, and the intervention of protective agents. It is capital because capacity accumulates and can be transported and exchanged in similar ways that economic capital does. It is social to the extent that such accumulation can only exist and has currency value within the context of social networks (Bourdeau, 1970; Coleman, 1988).

Social capital is different to human capital in that the latter refers to skills and knowledge an individual or group possess and bring into the labor marker (Smylie & Weaver Hart, 19). Social capital is also different to cultural capital because the latter refers to cultural markers an individual or group ascribes to or is associated with. Such associations are mediated by the class structures which, in turn, frame the relationships that give form and content to capital accumulation –social and cultural (Bourdeau and Passeron, 1970).

Socialization functions as the most central mechanism through which social capital is negotiated, grows and accumulates. Socialization occurs within the context of cultural norms, codes of power, and predisposition – beliefs and values --. I use the

notion of socialization as a process, not as an end., and as rather a space where groups and individuals negotiate their social positions. Such negotiations are based upon those groups' and individual's own social capital differential. This definition assumes that individuals utilize the resources their social networks might provide, particularly those involving relations of power. In other words, groups and individuals carry certain habits, understandings, skills and knowledge as markers of their social status, which in turn mediate their social position.

Racialized children and youth build social capital when they learn to negotiate their positioning within and across racialized groups, as well as with mainstream society. Such learning involves the development of an identity that nurtures itself from knowing and embracing one's own racial identity, understanding that of others, and being able to live and strive in the mainstream, dominant society.

In his discussion of socialization that carries social capital Staton-Salazar (1997) says:

> [minority children and youth's socialization] must be understood not only in terms of effectively decoding mainstream institutional settings, but also in terms of the development of various abilities to participate effectively in multiple cultural worlds. Key among these is the ability to cope effectively with institutional and environmental forces that threaten to compromise their human development and their life chances (p. 22).

Adults play a central role as facilitators of the socialization processes, such that, Staton-Salazar asserts, youth and children see their life chances seriously increased or diminished, depending on the degree of support "protective agents" (p.25) provide.

P*rotective agents* are those individuals who have some institutional authority (i.e. teachers, school leaders), and the potential to play counter-hegemonic roles. It is

precisely this potential role, Staton-Salazar argues, that can allow racialized children and youth to acquire social capital. As Katz (1999) asserts: "The teacher-student relationship, like other social relationships, has the potential to contain social capital. In the context of school, the relationship is productive - that is, it has social capital - if it yields student learning and achievement." (p. 813) Katz argues that adults can provide access to learning and achievement, thus to social capital, only when teachers are capable of combining high expectations and care.

Staton-Salazar indicates that coping plays a critical role in the process of social capital formation. He defines coping as "problem-solving capacities, network orientations, and instrumental behaviors that are directed toward dealing with stressful borders and institutional barriers." (p.26) In most cases coping is understood as resiliency, which tend to place on children the core agency for developing the problem-solving capacities to succeed in school, leaving out the responsibility of institutions and protective agents.[1]

Thus, it fallows that for racialized youth and children, learning how their own and other's culture functions should enable them to cross back and forth across the different stressful borders, and engage institutional barriers more successfully. For Staton-Salazar this learning takes place within networks. From these networks youngsters build their chances for successful bicultural socialization. Social networks operate in and around

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[1] The literature on resiliency touches on some of the issues raised by Katz. Authors such as Benard (1991), Kozol (1997), Wang & Gordon (1994), provide frameworks for understanding how children are capable of developing resiliency, and the role schools -- particularly that of teachers, parents and communities -- can play in forging an environment that allows resiliency to prosper. Contrary to this tradition, Krovetz (1999) proposes the building of resiliency as an institutional culture.

commonalties such as friendship, language, race, culture, and country of origin (Chavez, 1990, 1992; Miller, 1996).

Social networks operate in schools as collective agents, negotiating social status and identity. These social networks glue sets of friendship groups, and intersect with other social networks in rich and dynamic social hubs that serve as spaces for continuous and multiple socializing processes. These processes take physical form during classroom work, in the halls during passing periods, in the yards and cafeteria during lunch or physical education, as well as in the street and neighborhood after school.

Normalizing, resisting, and conflict

From the moment a child enters school she is subjected to an intense socialization experience -- from dress codes, to norms regimenting life in the halls, laboratories, and classroom work. At the core of this dynamic lies a dichotomy of normalization and resistance. Normalization in this paper means the institutional efforts aimed at imposing the hegemonic belief and value systems, aesthetics, style, and linguistic forms upon all members of the school community. Normalizing is the driving force of the adult – child relationship, molding both actors' -- particularly children's -- behavior to conform to a culture of compliance (Foucault, 1977).

I use resistance as group and individual contestation against such efforts, in an attempt to open alternative spaces for the belief and value systems, aesthetics, style, and linguistic forms of such individuals and groups considered at the margins of the hegemonic regime (Giroux, 1986; Giroux & McLaren, 1986). It also means the

unarticulated, spontaneous response children engage in against what they perceive as an objectifying, unjust and punitive culture that denies their becoming subjects. Of course, adults also resist the same forces for similar reasons, although their response varies to that of children.

By simultaneously denying the hegemony of what they associate to whiteness, and affirming their own cultural norms, children of color attempt to create cultural spaces that presumably will sustain them as authentic beings; (Fine, Weis & Powell, 1987). It is within this very context that social conflict takes center stage in the socialization process.

Indeed, the actual physical encounter of people triggers socialization. Other than the workplace or public areas, schools serve as the space where racialized youngsters converge; they enter into ongoing intense contact, often disputing space, resources, and attention, both within and across their own groups (Noguera, 1996). Allport (1954), one of the earliest authors on contact theory, noted that competition exacerbates tensions among groups, and that the actual and perceived status that groups and their individual members enjoy in society, determined the degree and type of their conflicts.

The notion that conflict is "lodged naturally in relationships" (Lederach, 1995, p. 17) and, therefore, deeply embedded in social interactions (Charmaz, 1983) has permeated current theory and practice around conflict in schools. It follows that, on the one hand, relationships are the most crucial factor shaping the context where communicating feelings and thoughts takes center stage; on the other hand, any conflict should be resolved through those same means – relationships and communication. Thus, Lederach proposes that elimination and control of conflict are impossible given the social nature of conflict itself.

Although Lederach builds this theory from his extensive experience around inter-racial and ethnic conflicts within nation states, I find his work appropriate to schools for several reasons. First, the author argues that the transformative effect of conflict can be seen in the change of communication patterns among the implicated parties, which, in turn, change relationships and social organizations. School buildings frame intense, potentially transformative, and complex communication dynamics that often transcend the school itself. Second, social conflict also transforms perceptions of both oneself, and the other. "In every instance," Lederach says, "[social conflict] raises a question about self-identity and esteem." (p. 18) In this sense, schools become settings where students and adults shape one another's social identity. Finally, Lederach proposes a model that takes into consideration the paradoxical nature of conflict as source of transformation, by suggesting an approach that elicits cooperation, wholeness and process.

Methodology

Action ethnographic research

The methodology used in this study is grounded on the notion that inquiry leads to change, and vice-versa. I provided external support to the site where this research took place coaching the school's leadership implement organizational and programmatic change. This contradictory condition –external coach and researcher -- enabled me to "see" and hence understand better what the participants (teachers and leaders) could not. From this external position I was also able to interrupt the normality of daily experience providing feedback about different pedagogical, instructional, and organizational issues the school was addressing. This double role was openly negotiated with the leadership team, and explained to the rest of the faculty. However, my coaching role dominated most of my interaction with

the faculty, except when I conducted interviews, observed classroom practices, or requested specific data from either teachers, or administrative personnel. And yet, the research and the coaching hats became one when I provided the leadership and faculty with key data I had tabulated and organized, technologies for managing change, available literature on change topics being addressed. Following such interventions, the process of searching for answers, formulating actions, and carrying these through their implementation, certainly offered me more rich and abundant data.

For instance, I fed the data back to teachers and administrators in the form of statistical tables and interview transcripts to be used in professional development workshops. This job helped me to further probe the school's reality on on-going bases. The production of knowledge, therefore, became a collective and situated endeavor with a dual purpose of learning and changing.

Moreover, coaching mediated my constant crossing of class, gender, age and linguistic borders in my relation with adults and children. While researching I reminded myself of my position as adult working for the school. I tried to understand children's utterances within the context of their own cultural norms and the specificity of the interviews, conversations, and general interactions. This meta-analytical awareness let me limit the risks of misunderstanding the participants' context, therefore reducing the wrong conclusions. This disposition provided me with the context to maintain a sense of humility myself. As Mishler (1986) states: "[T]erms take on specific and contextually grounded meanings within and through the discourse as it develops and is shaped by speakers" (p. 64).

The role of coach and researcher presented, nevertheless, a very important challenge. My desire to register the most authentic conversations, document the detail of events, and follow the implementation of plans was not always coherent with my role as external support. A key research concern was always around the extent of my affecting outcomes, which led me to limit my interventions to limit my influence as much as possible. Locating change agency, therefore, posed some difficulties all the time. Providing the answers to the questions raised by the data (and possibly getting at the core issues faster), or allowing the staff to arrive at their own conclusions much later summarize the constant dilemma of action ethnography.

Site

The study took place at Huerta Academy, a 500 students 6th to 8th grade school, located in an upper middle class neighborhood in San Francisco, California, with a student population of 42% Latino, 26% African American, 12% White, 10% Other Non White, and the rest Filipino and Chinese. Most students were bused from the city's main low-income neighborhoods.

Essential question

The essential question of this study was: In what ways does conflict between teachers and students mediate building social capital? I used this essential question to narrow the issues of teacher and students relationships in terms of social capital (I further developed a series of operational questions), and as a guide for focused classroom and meeting observations. This approach helped me to triangulate data generated by the different sources, which in turn allowed me to gain better understanding of the issues confronted by teachers and students.

Data Collection

The central unit of analysis was the inter-personal conflict -- which I organized as an event -- across peer and authority lines. I observed and followed up events as they happened particularly between child and adult, as well as between child and child. I documented such events in the classroom, the principal's office, the counseling office, the halls, the yard, the cafeteria, and P.E. areas. I also documented as events the moments adults engaged their individual and collective understandings of conflict and its ramifications, either in small groups or whole faculty meetings. This paper deals primarily with adult – child conflict.

I collected data shadowing some teachers and students, and depth-interviewing participants. I kept careful field notes documenting all events observed. I assisted the counseling office around discipline data, participated in teams, departments, and whole school meetings. The school-reform portfolio, achievement data, and data system analysis, were all important pieces of complementary data as well. Equally important, demographic data, school documents, and interview transcripts, made it possible to draw a complete contextual picture of the school community, its struggles and successes.

Participants

1)Group One: Student focus group: I selected a 6-student focus group across race, culture, gender, language, and academic performance. The 6 students selected were of the same cohort.

Roy: Chinese American, considered high performing student.

Chardnyse: African American, considered a low performing student.

LaToya: African American, considered a low performing student.

Tico: Mexican American, considered average performing student.

Ali: African American and Mexican considered low performing student.

Dominique: African American, considered a high performing student.

2) Teachers focal group: Using data generated by the student focus group, the statistics on discipline, and other evidence (such as classroom observation) I narrowed down the faculty to a focal group of 7 teachers, plus the principal (Mr. Angel).

Mr Andy P. and Mr. W. who left the school during the second year of the study, thus, data from interviews, classroom observations, and other sources are not utilized as much. In the case of Ms. Vela, during the second year she lowered the amount of referrals, but remained at the school. The rest: Mr. Mica, Mr. Young, Ms. Candy, Mr. Andres P. kept the same trend, and although Mr. Andres P. nurtured a positive relationship with students, his referrals record remained high.

The Study

This study is divided into three major sections. First I describe the social context that creates the educational environment where social capital is generated. Second, I document the complexity of power, resistance and normalizing issues that frame teachers and students daily experience. Finally, I discuss some key findings, suggestions, and issues the study raise.

1. Context for social capital production

Referrals

Referrals, suspensions and expulsions are the only discipline incidents schools keep some paper trail. Data show that the reason teachers issue the majority of referrals is primarily due to what they call "defiance" and "repeated disruption." Moreover, African American children are disproportionately referred -- relative to their numerical size -- to the counseling or administration office. Latino children follow, although not at the same disproportionate level of the former.

Table 1 shows (see appendix) that more than half of all referrals were issued for defiance and repetitive disruption during 1997-98, and instead of decreasing, the rate jumped to three quarters the next year. In the meantime verbal abuse and fighting, although important, dropped considerably from one year to the next. The fact that children receive referrals mainly because of defiance and disruption suggests that cultural, racial, and linguistic issues might be at the core of such incidents.

Table 2 (see appendix) compares 6th and 7th grade students from 1997-98 to 1998-99 school years. It shows that about one of every two African American children received at least one referral during the two years. This means that the 6th

grade cohort in 1997-98 who then became 7th graders in 1998-99 experienced a discipline culture that made them very high targets for referrals. Following African Americans are Latino students who went down from 21 percent in 1997-98 to 15 percent in 1998-99, a total reduction of 6 percentage points.

In order to complement this portrait I also looked at data showing who issued the referrals (see table three in appendix). Only 2 out of the 9 teachers who issued about half of all referrals were people of color, while the rest were white. These two teachers of color issued about 13% of the referrals, while white teachers issued the rest --34%. I didn't study the remaining 53% of the referrals because they were spread among 20 staff members (an average of less than 3 referrals per person), therefore statistically irrelevant for this study.

It is illustrative that nine teachers issued about half of all the referrals during the baseline-year (1997-1998), while for the comparative year (1998-1999), only 5 teachers did the same (Mr. Mica, Mr. Young, Ms. Candy, Mr. Andres P.). However, Mr. Mica alone issued 27% of all referrals during the comparative year, which skews the results and confounds the analysis. Yet, if this individual teacher's amount is reduced to an average of 31 referrals, still the concentration of referrals issued (about 50%) for the 1998-1999 comparative year remains higher (6 teachers) than the baseline-year (9 teachers).

The fact that some teachers decreased their number of referrals from one year to the next might mean that they either did not write referrals anymore, the classroom conditions changed (e.g. improved classroom management, reduced class size, better

alignment between teachers' skills and experience with the school's needs), or something else happened.

During the second year of this study, four teachers left, and yet their absence did not result in a reduction of the amount of referrals. Other teachers in 1998-99 (see table four in appendix) kept the trend documented the year before. This replacement process resembles the findings about students labeled troublemakers, and expelled from school. As soon as they leave, others take their place (Noguera, 1995). In other words, referrals are concentrated among a small number of teachers, but widespread among students.

Referrals form a key piece of social capital formation in that the accumulated effect of children going to the office might be devastating in terms of social capital formation. In an attempt to provide a narrative of the human and social texture to the numbers above, I focused on the conflicts that lead to detention as the first stage of the referrals path. Or incidents that did not mean immediate disciplinary action (i.e. referrals, detention) but that set the stage up for this to happen.

Thus, using the indicators so far described I followed the details of classroom dynamics as the research strategy I believed could lead me to understand the root causes of Huerta Middle's discipline culture. I turned my attention first to detention, and then to other interactions between teachers and students. In the following section I trace the micro social dynamics as they took place through the detention process.

Detention

Detention takes place exclusively between the teacher and the student. Teachers assign students detention much more frequently than they issue referrals. Teachers use detention all the time, and can be given to one student, a group of students, or the whole class. Although a district's manual, and the school's own specific policies exist, teachers apply this disciplinary action almost at their personal discretion. Detention usually means that a student will remain in the classroom, or a specially designated place in the school, where he or she spends certain time either during lunch, or after school. Nonetheless the violation, whatever it was, did not merit a referral. Lunch period is the most popular time for detention. Keeping students in a classroom (the teacher's or a "detention center") during one of the most important socializing moments of the school day hits students where it hurts the most -- not hanging out with their buddies.

The public display of names (i.e. on the board) often escalates from an initial small problem between the teacher and a student to full-scale confrontations. Once the conflict escalates, it often seems difficult to create the necessary spaces for reflection and negotiation. Teachers end up imposing their authority upon youngsters by issuing them a detention time. Students are quite fast to assign judgment value to this type of discipline, and react immediately. By the time the student receives the detention, she or he already believes something unfair has taken place. Likewise, teachers might also react at what they perceive as flagrant violations to both their

sense of professional dignity and authority, and to the disruption of classroom rules, probably adopted from the beginning of the school year.

During a follow up series of classroom observations, I saw Mr. Mica's style. He would often say -- sotto voce -- to the whole class: "you're not listening." As children kept talking among themselves, or playing with the musical instruments, Mr. Mica would again repeat --mantra-like-- the exact same words, in the exact same tone at least five times; "you're not listening." Then, without hesitation he would write down several names on the blackboard. Predictably enough, every child, upon seeing his name on the board, protested, and a shouting match would ensue; on the one hand, students asking explanations as to why their names were on the board -- some already with a check – and, on the other, Mr. Mica defending his action. At the end of class, numerous names remained on the board, followed by countless strings of check marks.

Recalling a particularly difficult incident in Mr. Mica's class, students from the focus group said:

Roy: "He once {Mr. Mica} sent us all out of class."

Latoya: "I don't see why they [students] keep doing that. One time, I think two weeks ago, our whole class was being bad and stuff. I was sitting there, and he sent the whole class to the office. Mr. Mica came cursing and yelling, like "sit your assess out," and then like Mr. Angel had us to clean the whole yard, and we were like we didn't do anything."

GA: "Why was that?"

Domini: "Because we were being bad."

GA: "What do you mean being bad?"

Domini: "Throwing chairs and yelling, standing on the chairs and talking back, and jumping and bothering people."

GA: "Bothering people?"

Roy: "Like [somebody] hitting your head with books and stuff."

Chardn: "Do you remember why we had all that mess?"

Latoya: "Because he] Mr. Mica] was giving everybody referrals."

Chardn: "Everybody's name was on the board with three checks and stuff. Nobody would listen to him,"

Domini: "Me and Chardnyse were sitting there and watching, and we were like -- now what?"

Students seem to perceive the writing of names on the board as a simple imposition of the teacher's will which, in turn, provokes students' resistance. Once the student -- teacher relationship is framed as confrontational, the teacher's power more likely will erode. When the teacher writes names on the board -- as Mr. Mica did -- he is publicly letting students know they were caught violating classroom rules, and that they better modify their behavior or a check next to their name will soon appear.

Marking checks for every violation after the initial warning -- as in the event retold by the focus group – discipline appears to the student as an arbitrary occurrence. In situations where it is obvious to the student that the teacher has no other means of communicating respect, or engaging them in meaningful work, discipline becomes a simple control technique that triggers the use of violent

language among all participants. Students, at the same time, find in these moments an excuse to act out, to posture, and to exhibit their worse possible behavior in their intent to derail the teacher's efforts to teach, to show off before their friends, and to

2. Power and resistance and normalizing

Language

do nothing else but to play at being "bad."

The harsh treatment students from low-income households tend to encounter in schools -- as opposed to a more polite and soft treatment afforded to middle class youngsters -- presupposes that the only language they are able to understand is rough. Additionally, this treatment presumes that their parents will do nothing.

This treatment, in turn, helps foster the perception among low socioeconomic background children that teachers reject them and schools are hostile environments. Anyon (1997) argues that in such social contexts children learn to achieve failure (p.33). And yet, the author further explains, youngsters relate to the treatment they received rather than to the teacher who subjected them to such treatment. In Anyon's study, all children "said it did not matter whether you had a white or black teacher." (p. 33)

Some teachers of color explain the use of rough language and treatment as a strategy to teach kids of color the social skills they need to survive in a hostile society. As a Latino teacher referring to his students stated: "If they're not tough, they'll suffer." What teachers hope students will know and be able to do is deeply linked to relationships. Aiding kids to establish rich and meaningful relations is at the

heart of social capital formation. I asked Mr. Albert, an African American English teacher, about his seemingly rough treatment of black students. He explained that he needed to show them how the system operates, because

> [Y]ou cannot just do whatever you want. You need to know better how the system works, go around it and push for your own interests. If you go against the system it will smash you. (Mr. Albert. Teacher interview series)

He recognized being harsher with his students of color, because otherwise "nobody will teach them those survival strategies." Teaching not to assimilate, but to be able to "know better how the system works," he argued, was his goal. His understanding of teachers as protective agents appeared more as an attempt to inculcate traditional masculine treats than developing the sophisticated skills necessary for negotiating social and cultural borders and institutional barriers.

The thin, blurry line that separates teaching students to survive in contexts of power inequities while preserving their racial and cultural authenticity represents a hard pedagogical challenge. Operating from their first-hand experience, teachers of color bear, nevertheless, the burden of knowing the intricacies of negotiating their social and cultural positions with the mainstream culture. And whether they accept it or not, they inevitably come with an added symbolic value to their teaching role. Thus, any action -- particularly punitive ones -- has a great potential of being very influential in developing or hindering social capital formation.

Students seem extremely aware of and very responsive to these dynamics, and appear to have a keen awareness to form and content of adults' body and oral

communication (Lipman, 1998). Yolanda (a girl from Latoya's friendship network) poignant recollection of an event that led to her 12th referral, stated:

> When Ms. Candy lady was always telling me to shut up and I was like, 'you don't tell me to shut up. You can tell me to be quiet but you can't tell me to shut up.' And she goes, 'Now, you're talking too much.' I'm like, 'Now, *you* shut up.' Then she's like 'well you've got to go down to the office.' I was like, 'well, I don't care.' Then she says 'well go down to the office' and then she gave me a referral. (Student focus group interviews)

Having an attitude

Journal Entry

> 11/16/98
> "I was in the computer laboratory requesting an account for my word processing. The technology teacher, a white, middle-aged woman, sitting next to me is explaining how to log on. Some noise comes from one end of the room and she raises her head. We see a tall, thin, reddish hair, light skin African American boy touching a girl. The teacher stands up and shouts across the room:
> "That was uncalled for. Why did you touch that girl? She was not asking for it! You have no right to interrupt her work and touch her body." Surprised, but quickly the boy protests:
> " I didn't touch her!"
> " I saw you! You touched her bottom!" The teacher insists. The student then retorts, his voice cracking at the end of the sentence:
> "I only touched her back, that's it."
> "She didn't ask you to touch her bottom." The teacher charges again, and walks toward the student while explaining how inappropriate his behavior was. Then she asks the boy:
> "Who is your teacher?"
> From one of the chairs comes a loud answer:

"I'm his teacher." --A tall young, white male stands up, turns to the student and says--
"What are you doing standing up there, Jamal? Sit!" - Raising his voice a couple of decibels, he orders the kid-- "Go to your sit, finish your work! You have no business walking in this room! You know the rules!" The technology teacher comes back to me explaining how to log on. I can't listen to her. I am observing the student. He moves slowly, looking to the floor in the direction of his seat, muttering: "bitch! bitch!" He places an open notebook before him and tries to type for a while. The phone rings, the teacher answers; then she talks to the group of about 6 kids using the computers.
"I just got a call from a teacher who needs to use the lab. You know that a teacher's class has first priority. No more than 4 of you can stay here, the rest, I'm sorry, must go back to your classes. Let me count. OK, two of you need to leave and go back to your class." --And in the same breath, she faces two kids, and talks one at a time-- "You (the student who got in trouble earlier) must go. You brought it upon yourself. I cannot have you here. The student gets up reluctantly and does not want to leave, he asks the teacher many times "Why me?" He stays in the room. The teacher lifts the phone and threatens the kid with calling the office and having him removed from the room. A girl (the same he had touched) gets up and comes to the boy and nicely, whispers to him: "C'mon man, just leave. She'll get on your case. Don't listen to her. Leave." She takes the boy by his waist and gently pushes him out. The boy gets out.
I went out and followed the kid and talked to him in the hall. I asked him if this was the first time he had gotten in trouble in the lab; he said yes, but that it was easy to get in this kind of situation in there. He had just been publicly humiliated and went to his next class, obviously upset.

This vignette describes the transformation of an apparently innocuous incident into a hugely serious one. The tone of every utterance and the accompanying gestures expose some of the social tensions running deep between adults and youngsters. One

of such tensions is the perception and the making of being a "bad kid." Students carefully take their cues from the way adults relate to them, and once youngsters confirm their insights, they skillfully act out their being "bad," and teachers often confirm and deepen their assumptions. Children's own social and cultural baggage compounds these socialization dynamics and contribute to the undoing of theis social capital.

Being "bad" is directly linked to reputation and to attitude. As Tico (from the focus group) puts it: "When I see the teacher is not listening to me, or when I know adults are judging me, it really gets me and makes me do the opposite." (focus group interviews) Perceptions certainly become a reality when attitudes and behaviors feed into expectations created through unreflective practices that again feed back into behaviors and attitudes in an endless downward spiral.

Jamal had frequently been in trouble with other teachers, and seemed to attract scrutinizing attention from them much more so than any other student. It would not have surprised me if he was in trouble at some point during the day of the incident described above. The computer teacher knew about him and was alert to his movements in the room. And her assumptions were confirmed the moment she saw him touching the girl. There was no escape for Jamal. His teacher, sitting nearby, witnessed the situation and seemed to have expected nothing but trouble from Jamal. When he intervened was to underscore the technology teacher's actions. Jamal is left to his own limited coping devices, the support from his peers, and at the end uses the only thing he knows – denial of his actions, and defiance to the teachers' authority.

A few days prior to this incident, his African American English teacher had sent him to the principal's office. I saw him then, and he was visibly upset, and desperate. All he wanted to do was to go back to his room and confront the teacher. Mr. Angel, the principal, helped him to calm down, control his anger and understand what had happened. According to his story, the teacher had slammed his backpack on the floor, taking it away from him and, after placing it in a cabinet, promised to give it back at the end of the day. The student wanted to know the state of his possessions inside the bag, and wondered when could he take out one of his notebooks.

The teacher later confirmed the student's story, but added that this incident took place only after he, the teacher, had requested all students to put away their stuff. He wanted the tables and desks clean and ready for the next activity. The teacher saw Jamal with his backpack and after asking him to put it away he intervened and did it himself. "What gets me is his attitude," the teacher insists. The relationship between students wearing certain "attitude" and teachers who avail themselves to define it, undoubtedly frames the socialization of such student before his or her peers. During our session about attitudes, the focus group had this to say:

GA: "Why did you get in trouble?"

Chard: "I only wanted to go to the bathroom and she [the teacher] said 'no.'

Roy: "I think that, that is 'cause of the way you act, like attitude, in class. It's not the work you do. It's, if you talk or [if] you're quiet and do your work. That's not because of the color or nothing, it's 'cause the way you act."

Domin: "That happened to somebody else. She --Ms. L.-- let people play in the hall and stuff. You know. When you really need to go to the bathroom, she won't let you go, 'cause she thinks somebody else is out."

GA: "Do you think kids tend to get different treatment?"

Domin: "Yes, in Ms. L. I do goofy stuff and she gave me an "S" [Satisfactory citizenship] but Minno got a "W" [Warning] for doing almost the same thing. I play around more than him."

In a session just with Dominique and Ali (from the focus group), I asked her how she defined Ali. Without hesitation she answered: "he's black." I probed a little further and asked:

GA: "Why? Part of his family is Mexican. He speaks fluent Spanish and English."

Domin: "Well, 'cause he's got an attitude."

GA: "What do you mean?

Domin "He acts black."

GA: "Can you explain? How do you see this?"

Domin: "I don't know. He just has an attitude, like when he talk, the way he talk, or dress. He just does."

I then turned to Ali. I wanted to know how he would describe himself. I wanted to know his thoughts about Dominique's characterization.

GA: "What do you think? Do you have an attitude? How do you act black?"

Ali: "If I get in a fight, if I have to handle something, I do it. I'm tall. Last time I was almost jumped on. In Rooftop, a jerk --Dominique knows him -- a black

guy. I talked that kid straight up. 'You know what,' I said, 'I feel sorry for you, \cause that shows to me that your Mom don't work, you don't ask her for things. The only thing you know is to steal; that's the way you were brought up.' He didn't do nothing [to me]."

In other words, Ali was able to deal with and come up clean from a situation that could have cost him at least a beaten. Dominique did not describe Ali on the basis of his skin pigmentation, but precisely in terms of his capacity to stand up by himself. In other words, he has developed some copping skills that help him negotiate a very stressful situation. For her, what makes Ali black is his attitude, which to her is something he wears, exudes, impossible to describe with words. His only presence makes the point. For Ali, having an attitude is using body size, being assertive, and courageous.

Ogbu's (1994) and Ogbu's and Bianchi's (1986) research has shown that African American kids tend to establish oppositional dynamics to the mainstream, dominant culture, achieved through what the authors have called cultural inversion. It seems that the authors only saw one aspect of the issue – the mechanical response to situations that seem to force cultural norms foreign to their own. What the experience of the focus group and other youngsters from their social networks shows -- such as the one in the vignette -- is that such responses appear to also be the enactment of a personal position before the world. That is, carving a reputation and carrying it over time means letting the adult world know, as well as the peers', that he or she has an authenticity owned by them, and no one else.

Talking back plays a key role as a defining element of attitude. It is perhaps the most important strategy children use to weight their unavoidable presence. Talking back is mostly expressed through rough utterances and/or body language (glaring looks, posturing, physical action). In the words of author bell hooks (1989), talking back is considered among some African American communities a child's attempt at being equal to adults, born out of a femaleness sense of talking. Talking back, she argues, is a way to express one's opinions, of sculpting one's own voice. To speak when "one was not spoken to [as a] courageous act," (p. 6) she explains. In other words, a child builds spaces in the adult world by inserting their voice in an adult dominated discourse. Moreover, youngster's sense of fairness frames events and individual behavior in very clear opposites. They leave few events in a gray area, and wear an explicit expectation of fair treatment everywhere; as soon as they sense a violation of such expectation, the impulse to resist is inevitable.

When I asked why students talk back Chardnyse put it this way: "'cause he [the teacher] made him [another student] mad." Then Roy rationalized the event in these terms:

> When we say something to Mr. Mica, he's just like 'Get out of my class, you got a referral' or something like that. He wouldn't give you a chance first, and then say it (focus group interviews).

Talking back appears to also help youngsters both to preserve their dignity and to gain a status within their friendship group. By talking back a child is letting her peers, and adults, know that she is someone to reckon with, and who demands a higher social status from peers, and from adults as well.

According to the focus group's experience, attitude and reputation are closely linked, and indeed one seems to feed the other. The reputation associated to racialized youngsters marks every individual in the group, regardless of who they are. In cases where a particular child does not exhibit the reputation's descriptors (whichever they might be), adults still see them.

[punishment] has to do with background and stuff. When you get a referral, teachers keep thinking you're bad. [After a] referral they keep thinking you're bad; even though you think you changed, the teacher thinks you're bad, so they're like stricter to you. You know that you changed, but the teacher thinks you didn't; people think you're bad, and they're stricter and mean to you. (Roy. Focus group interviews)

Cultural norms

Talking about her classroom experience Ms. Vela compared her current students to last year's:

> Now my classroom experience is like day and night compared to last year's. I practically don't have black students, only four. I don't know why [I have these four students] but I think it is because they're really behind. Otherwise all my kids are English language learners. If I'd have more black kids, my classroom would again be as noisy as last year's. (Ms. Vela. Teacher interview series)

She seems to imply that her classroom is better behaved, at least less noisy, than last year's, almost exclusively because now she only has a few African American children. This assertion reflects an assumed understanding of cultural difference, since being noisy is equated to misbehavior, which presumably is a black

attribute . The teacher generalizes her particular experience to the group; as Ogbu (1994) asserts, people of color are not judged as individuals, but as group. Additionally, Ms. Vela – a Filipino American herself --seems to have already accepted and internalized the belief that black children are loud and thus unable to learn and difficult to behave well.

Discipline rules and regulations provides the context for socializing children to cultural norms that might deny or build social capital. Some teachers operate their classroom as a place where "no-no" regulates every move. No hats, no food, no chewing, no talking, no standing up, no answering the intercom. Few activities are left to chance. When "no" rules are used as a management strategy, students will inevitably try to break each of them.

GA "How was the situation with Ms. Candy?'

Latoya: " 'Cause I was walking to the garbage can to spit out a cookie and she was like 'you're chewing in class, you've got to scrape the floor under the desks for detention.' "

GA: "So, she caught you."

Latoya: "She said that 'cause Lahonda got one too."

GA: "Who?"

Latoya: "Lahonda, this girl who's always chewing something."

Ali: "Oh, yea, she's always eating, like she needs to eat. She probably has an eating problem."

What in this event appears to bother Latoya the most is that not only she had to scrape the floors, but that she was unjustly punished as a result of Lahonda's

detention. When Ms. Candy disciplined first Lahonda and then Latoya, she was probably seeking consistency in applying her "no" rule. Yet if Ms. Candy had spoken to Lahonda, she might have had a better understanding as to why this child was chewing in class, and the outcome for Latoya's infraction would probably have been less severe. Ms. Candy apparently fell into the trap of acting upon a snippet of reality to impose her authority. Children are left with no recourse to explain themselves and understand what is going on while adults embark themselves in an unfortunate one-way trip -- when a rule is broken, the person responsible must pay.

Furthermore, authority mediates adults' power. It is only through the use of the position she enjoys -- as the one in charge of the classroom -- that Ms. Candy asserted her control upon Latoya. Justice is not redressed for Latoya, in the same way that imposing authority will hardly support a congenial and respectful relationship between Ms. Candy and Latoya. Classroom dynamics forged on "no" rules appear to most likely trigger uncooperative and socially unhealthy classroom practices. As Mr. JR., a well-liked teacher, puts it: "You don't get defiance if you're open minded. Kids will defy you if they don't feel respected, when they feel that something is not fair." (Teacher interview series)

"Power stems from the students themselves. Teachers have authority, not power," Mr. Angel, the principal, insisted during a professional development meeting. He suggested that learning and teaching is determined more by students' willingness to engage with the classroom material, than by imposing administrative authority. When teachers have earned their trust, students will let them do their job. Hence, respect will ultimately mediate power relations between students and teachers.

Without this power teachers are left only with being in charge of delivering formal knowledge.

Recalling a stressful encounter in the halls, the students from the focus group had this to say:

Latoya: "Mr. S. is a strict teacher. I was walking the hall and he asked me to go outside."

Domin: "Yea, me too. I was walking the hall. I wasn't feeling good and I was leaving the school. I had my pass and everything, and he was like 'where're you going little girl.' I was like 'what?' 'Where're you going little girl.' And I go, 'I'm leaving school.' And he was like 'Go back, you can't leave the school.' "

GA: "What made you react like that?"

Domin: "Cause he called me 'little girl.' He knows my name. And he was like, 'You go back, you're trespassing.' "

Dominique expected to be called by her name and be treated personally, given that, according to her, Mr. S. knew her by name. Instead, Mr. S., an African American teacher, treated her in generic terms --"little girl." Dominique also reacted against Mr. S. accusation that she was breaking the rules. He seemed certain she had no pass and, therefore, should not be allowed in the halls. Dominique insisted he never asked for the pass. Relating to students from an administrative authoritarian position is further complicated as a cultural norm when beliefs around teaching and learning take on a linear and simplistic rout. Thus, the idea that no one has the right to disrupt other's learning process is a legitimate belief. The problem with the

statement, though, has to do with at least two classroom practices into which many teachers translate this belief. Some teachers advocate for drastic discipline measures using "no" rules, -- which has been reviewed in the previous section -- and some for principled base discipline.

Management by elimination apparently allows teachers to establish control and focus on teaching, "You just get rid of the troublemakers," Mr. Mica declared. Indeed, getting rid of students take different forms, from expelling to systematically pushing youngsters out of the classroom via referrals, detentions, or simply sending them into the halls. Harsh discipline approaches tend to be a one-sided process. On behalf of safety in the classroom some advocate for tactics such as ejecting disruptive students out into the halls, sending them to the office, or isolating them in the classroom itself. In the latter case, students are not allowed back to continue their classroom work until the teacher so decides. Mr. Yung was very clear:

> It is the ghetto kids who destroy the classroom. They don't have the right to do it [disrupt instruction]. Get rid of the ringleaders, and you'll get a better school. (Mr. Young Teacher interview series)

The "ghetto kids" is a not so subtle code to designate low-income background black and Latino children. Mr. young implies in his remarks two things: firstly, that defiance and disruption will very likely, if not exclusively, come from these youngsters; secondly, that the cultural connotations of defiance and disruption are exclusively his own. Teachers against this punitive approach to discipline, worry about the effects of such policy on kids. Mr. JR summarized this concern: "I hear more and more the argument that we need to take the 'troublemakers' out of school.

People write referrals as a way to get rid of these kids." (Mr. JR. Teacher interview series).

Noguera (1995) demonstrated that punitive actions (i.e. expulsions or suspensions) against the ringleaders, or any student for that matter, do not work and are rather detrimental to children and adults. As soon as the "troublemaker" leaves an empty space, new troublemakers tend to take it over, as a revolving door phenomenon. Noguera (1995a) suggests that approaches to discipline as social control not only interrupt learning but contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of distrust and resistance.

In some cases, disciplinarian teachers might even exert peer pressure on those colleagues they perceive as lenient. If a teacher becomes known as a too nice teacher, some colleagues might qualify this as a sign of weak classroom management. As Ms. Vela explains: "I don't think giving kids referrals helps. Kids take them as revenge." She admitted being pressured by some colleagues demanding that she should be harder on children. As a result, Ms. Vela modified her relationship with students, and by the end of the year (1997-1998) she had become harsher. "Last year I was paying attention more to the emotional and less to the academic," Ms. Vela said, and continued, "I'd rather pay attention to the academic without forgetting that the emotional is crucial for kids. No affection, no academics. I gave to these kids love, care." And then she concludes: "Other teachers saw it as disorganization, chaos, because my kids would always be asking me things, and talking to each other. Other teachers who passed by my class would ask me to be more firm, and by that they meant giving more referrals." (Ms. Vela. Teacher-interview series)

According to the focus group Ms. Vela started the new school year (1998-1999) much tougher than the previous one. "Now she is more strict and stuff," Latoya admitted in an interview. Strict here means punitive, zero tolerant. For these students the message seemed clear -- don't mess with Ms. Vela. However, as table 4 shows (see appendix), by the end of the 1998-1999 school year, Ms. Vela fell out of the charts. She no longer issued referrals to her students, which might mean that since she had no African American and Non-ELL Latino students, the reasons for toughening classroom control disappeared. ELL students might have been closer to her cultural and racial assumptions and expectations, or perhaps she grew and negotiated classroom spaces in a wiser manner.

Contrary to "no" drastic rules, some teachers advocate for principled discipline. The faculty at Huerta Middle, as a whole, for years pursued a comprehensive set of principles as the foundation of the school's discipline policy. These were elevated to "standards" and were collectively thought, approved, and implemented. But as the data from the tables show, discipline problems continued as if that was the only approach teachers use to relate to their students.

It seems clear that the "no" and the principled based discipline move in parallel lines. While most teachers formally agree with the latter approach, they still use the "no" policy in their classrooms. Some who disagree publicly with the principled approach tend to use some of the ideas in their classroom practices. The uneven implementation of the principle based discipline puts into question the extent of consensual meanings, and what issues rather take an underground, unspoken course, that overrides, or seriously modifies the formal, official process. For years the

school has operated publicly as a principled based school that has brought district wide and even national recognition. Yet, at the level of the private, individual bases, principles tend to not only interpreted in idiosyncratic ways. As Ms. Terry expressed it in a whole faculty meeting discussing this very issue: "We need to standardize our standards," further explaining that "[W]e need to talk so that we can build some common understandings as to what [these] standards mean to us, and how we apply them."

Conclusions and Suggestions

The adult to child social conflict paradigm at Huerta Middle is characterized by the existence of a discipline culture that targets children of color -- especially African American. As data shows, the dissonance between these children's modes of behavior and the adults' cultural norms sit at the center of social conflict. Teachers, on the one hand, interpret such behavior in ways that only lead to a clash with the student's own cultural positions. Students, on the other, tend to play at the expectations and power dynamics in ways that only escalate the negative impact of their resistance on their capacity to build social capital.

Students know when a teacher has no idea how to handle the classroom, when a teacher appears as not caring. Once students know, they will usually behave accordingly, deploying all their skills to go around the teacher's behavior in a compliant mood, or when to actively or passively resist. In any of these instances, developing coping skills, learning to overcome institutional barriers, or developing the sophisticated skills to negotiate stressful cultural borders, do not happen.

Moreover, students tend to be framed by preconceived racialized notions, defined as "reputation." In relatively closed social systems – like schools -- the dynamics created by this framing more likely end up perpetuating prevailing cultural and racial stereotypes.

Teachers play effectively their protective agency role when they are flexible enough to understand the function that attitude, talking back, and reputation have in establishing a status space within networks. This study suggests that many teachers of color tend to believe that the strategy to survive as authentic cultural individuals is by being tough against mainstream culture. Yet, they tend to relate to children of color in a manner generally perceived as rough and abusive. The notion that adults of color know better than anybody else the specificity of children of color's culture in reality presents, as I have documented here, a double edge sword. On the one hand, these teachers can help children of color to build their cultural decoding and coping skills that facilitate their building of a strong cultural and racial identity, all of which, in turn, will translate into social capital. On the other hand, given their place as racial mirrors and their access to the child's deepest cultural, social, and emotional texture, teachers of color might imprint upon a child of color greater damage, thus disabling children from building social capital.

Conflict necessarily goes through the filters of race and cultural negotiation. Teachers engage conflict according to their own biographies, which define their perceptions and beliefs about what constitutes teaching for assimilation or teaching for authentic identity. For some, teaching compliant behavior equates to teaching

students of color to assimilate to the dominant values and thus, condemning these students to oblivion.

Suggestions

1. School leaders and teachers need to include the notion of social networks as cultural and organizational principle, rather than working with students just as individuals.

2. Teachers need to develop skills on conflict mediation, and understand that social conflict is part of socialization and cannot be treated as a decease that can be cured and treated separate from the social body. Instead, conflict mediation needs to be part of the life of the school.

3. Adults need to understand that when they intervene they are only seeing a snippet of reality. The task is, then, to fill in the different pieces and construct a clear frame of reference to fully understand the conflict.

4. Teachers need to learn the meanings of protective agency and their individual and collective role in helping to build social capital. Key in this is the different meanings that reputation and talking back play within social networks. Equally important, adults and children ought to understand the social function of attitude, coping, and cultural norms that frame the socialization experience. The assumption here is that this understanding will support the building of social capital not only for children but for adults too.

Appendix

TABLE ONE
Huerta Middle Academy School
Comparative referrals issued to 6th and 7th graders during Oct. To March, 1997-1998 and Oct. To March, 1998-1999 school years by type of referral

Incidents	1997-1998 Number of Referrals	%	1998-1999 number of referrals	%	Change
1. Def. of authority	132	32.0	228	57	+25
2. Rep. Disruption	105	26.0	79	20	- 6
3. Verbal abuse	71	17.2	17	4.5	- 12.7
4. Fighting	69	17.0	39	9	- 8
5. Unprep. for class	21	5.0	21	5	0
6. Vandalism	3	0.7	0	N/A	N/A
7. Theft	1	0.2	16	4	+3.8
8. Weapons	1	0.2	2	0.5	+0.3
9. Unspecified	7	1.7	0	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	410		402		

TABLE TWO
Huerta Middle Academy School
Comparative referrals issued to 6th and 7th grade students Oct. to March 1997-1998 and Oct. to March 1998-1999 by race/ethnicity

Race/ Ethnicity	# of 6th-7th grade students referred 1997-1998	6th-7th grades total populati on 1997-98 by race/ ethnicity	% of students referred relative to the ethnic group	# of 6th-7th grade students referred 1998-1999	6th-7th grades total populati on 1998-99 by race/ ethnicity	% of students referred relative to the ethnic group
Af.Ameri can	52	102	51	40	76	53
Latino	32	149	21	22	143	15
Other White	4	43	9	12	41	29
O.Non White	3	27	11	3	20	0.6
Filipino	2	6	33	1	7	14
Chinese	1	13	8	0	0	0

*Source: Counselors Action records.

TABLE THREE
Huerta Middle Academy
Comparative Referrals issued to 6 & 7 graders. Oct.-March 1997-1998 and Oct.-March 1998-1999 by Teacher

Teacher's last name	1997-1998 Total Referrals Issued	% of total referrals	1998-1999 Total Referrals Issued	% of total referrals
1.Mr.Mica	37	11	110	27
2.Mr.Yong	33	9	36	9
3.Mr. W.	25	7	OUT	OUT
4.Mr.Andy P.	24	3	16	4
5.Ms.Vela	22	6	2	0.5
6.Ms.Candy	20	5.5	28	7
7.Ms. B.	18	5	OUT	OUT
8.Mr. L.	16	4.5	OUT	OUT
9.Mr. R.	16	4.5	OUT	OUT
Total	191	46.58	192	47.5

Source: counselor action records

TABLE FOUR
Huerta Middle Academy
Comparative referrals issued to 6 & 7 graders.
Oct.-March 1997-1998 and Oct.-March 1998-1999
by Teacher

Teacher	1998-1999 # of referrals	% of total
Ms. L.	31	8
Ms. P.	26	6
Mr. M.	13	3
Ms. K	13	3

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